

## Readings from the Common Bowl

“As human beings, not only do we seek resolution, but we also feel that we deserve resolution. However, not only do we not deserve resolution, we suffer from resolution. We don’t deserve resolution; we deserve something better than that. We deserve our birthright, which is the middle way, an open state of mind that can relax with paradox and ambiguity.” Pema Chödrön

“...The difference between ignorant and educated people is that the latter know more facts. But that has nothing to do with whether they are stupid or intelligent. The difference between stupid and intelligent people—and this is true whether or not they are well-educated—is that intelligent people can handle subtlety. They are not baffled by ambiguous or even contradictory situations—in fact, they expect them and are apt to become suspicious when things seem overly straightforward.” Neal Stephenson

“Listening is more than being quiet while the other person speaks until you can say what you have to say. I like the language Rachel Naomi Remen uses with young doctors to describe what they should practice: ‘generous listening.’ Generous listening is powered by curiosity, a virtue we can invite and nurture in ourselves to render it instinctive. It involves a kind of vulnerability—a willingness to be surprised, to let go of assumptions and take in ambiguity. The listener wants to understand the humanity behind the words of the other, and patiently summons one’s own best self and one’s own best words and questions.” Krista Tippett

“I feel with some passion that what we truly are is private, and almost infinitely complex, and ambiguous, and both external and internal, and double- or triple- or multiply natured, and largely mysterious even to ourselves; and furthermore, that what we are is only part of us, because identity, unlike ‘identity,’ must include what we do. And I think that to find oneself and every aspect of this complexity reduced in the public mind to one property that apparently subsumes all the rest (‘gay,’ ‘black,’ ‘Muslim,’ whatever) is to be the victim of a piece of extraordinary intellectual vulgarity.” Philip Pullman

“Many people fear nothing more terribly than to take a position which stands out sharply and clearly from the prevailing opinion. The tendency of most is to adopt a view that is so ambiguous that it will include everything and so popular that it will include everybody. Not a few men who cherish lofty and noble ideals hide them under a bushel for fear of being called different.” Martin Luther King, Jr.

"There was a wall. It did not look important. It was built of uncut rocks roughly mortared. An adult could look right over it, and even a child could climb it. Where it crossed the roadway, instead of having a gate it degenerated into mere geometry, a line, an idea of boundary. But the idea was real. It was important. For seven generations there had been nothing in the world more important than that wall. Like all walls it was ambiguous, two-faced. What was inside it and what was outside it depended upon which side of it you were on." Ursula Le Guin

"The root of happiness is knowing that everything changes. That's all there is to happiness. It's nothing you pursue. It's living in the constant continual paradox of life. The Vedas say that the yes and the no uttered together produce the silence. We spend so much of our time trying to take the yes and the no and resolve it. Instead of being pushed into wonder and not knowing, we have whole explorations of how we deal with paradox, how we live in paradox, how we resolve paradox. The yes and the no, the complete contrariness of life, is actually only meant to move us into silence." Margaret Wheatley

"...Mystics embrace paradox. Their practice makes them intensely aware of life's paradoxes. They notice that although everything appears to be part of one unity, life contains many opposites. Everything is united, yet life is made up of endless polarities, such as good and bad, hot and cold, and so on. Mystics sense that things are not immediately what they appear to be and that focusing on the pairs of opposites distracts them from the experience of unity: they understand that reality is larger than the polar opposites that make it up. ...Mystics, as Rumi did through his poetry, advise us to practice seeing beyond what can be seen with the physical eye ... and thereby peacefully embrace and see beyond the paradoxes of life." Edward Viljoen

"Speaking of salvation, Jesus and a host of other spiritual luminaries have weighed in on the subject with some counterintuitive and paradoxical wisdom. In a nutshell, it is this: 'Don't focus on saving yourself.... Focus on serving, saving, helping others. For if you try to save yourself, you lose yourself, yet if you seek to save others, you save both the other and yourself.' ...When we seek to save others—with our love and our compassion we become aware of our connectedness to the larger whole. Or, as Malvina Reynolds puts it in the song The Magic Penny: 'Love is something if you give it away, give it away, give it away. Love is something if you give it away. You end up having more.'" Rev. Richard Davis

"Rev. Charles Magistro ...[writes,] 'Our way in religion is not the way of ease. We are called to be sailors. For many worlds exist waiting to be discovered. And not the least of them are within ourselves. It takes much persistence, courage and curiosity to look into our own depths, to come to terms with the twin mysteries of being alive and having to die, to see ourselves in new and larger ways without being dishonest about our limitations. We have only begun to discover our potential.' Unitarian

Universalism does not give you freedom from religion; it gives you freedom for religion. Here is the great paradox of our faith.”  
Rev. Scott Alexander